

"The Essence and Seven Facets of Discipleship"

We only get one life. The author D.H. Lawrence wished for more. He said: *"If only one could have two lives. The first in which to make one's mistakes ... and the second in which to profit by them."* But we only get one life. We are not offered a rehearsal for this life, but we are offered a revelation that can guide us if we receive it. Jesus came into our world, making extraordinary claims. He extended a stunning invitation to whoever would hear it. He called us all to *come to him and follow him*.

Many people never consider his claims or his call. For a brief period of history starting a couple of hundred years ago, certain people opposed to Christianity pushed the claim that the gospels' stories of Jesus were legends embellished over the centuries. I often speak with people who have heard the Bible isn't trustworthy and believe that you can't really know much about Jesus. They are usually uninformed about the fact that there has been a scholarly countermovement pushing back against that secular skepticism for about a century now. The cumulative evidence is overwhelming that the gospel accounts of the life of Jesus are reliable and authoritative eyewitness testimony. A number of high-level scientists, who are committed believers in Jesus, have challenged some of their colleagues' entrenched unbelief. They have demonstrated that Christianity is not only spiritually and emotionally enriching but intellectually and rationally compelling. The famous British Author, A.N. Wilson, is known for his critical biographies. He wrote a life of Jesus in 1992 in which he presented the story of Jesus as a legend. But, in 2009, after years of writing books that attacked the Christian faith, he completely reversed his position. He confessed faith in Jesus because of the overwhelming evidence of the reality of Jesus' miraculous life, the power of his teaching and his resurrection from the dead.¹ He believed the claims and heard the call to follow Jesus.

We are beginning a series of messages this morning that will require us to seriously take to heart the claims and the call of Jesus. In **John 8:12**, Jesus said, *I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life*. There are only two options in this world; follow Jesus in the light or walk in the darkness. We do not get another life in which to learn from our mistakes but what

we can have, through faith in Christ, is the grace of God that not only forgives our failures but also the grace that reveals a very different way to live our lives and empowers us for it.

This last quarter of 2022, we are calling our people to strengthen our life together and our mission as a church as we continue to move past the troubles of the last two years. Our series on Haggai was a reminder that the LORD wants us to build his house. This morning we begin a series on discipleship. This is what we need to build God's house and what we need individually. This is what we need in our families and for our children to grow up as followers of Jesus who lived in homes where discipleship was authentic and life-giving. This is what we need, so the next generation continues in the faith. And this is what the world needs to see from us and in us. It was true in the days when Jesus walked the paths and roads through the villages of ancient Israel and called people to follow him. ***The way to make the most of the rest of your life is to make a serious commitment to becoming a fully developed disciple of Jesus Christ.***

In a world and culture in which more and more people are coming under the dominating influence of their individual feelings and perceptions regarding everything from identity, to morality, to truth itself, the message of the Bible offers a radically different way to live.

It tells you ...

**I. JESUS IS THE LORD YOU CAN OBEY WITH CONFIDENCE
EVEN WHEN WHAT HE TELLS YOU TO DO
DOES NOT MAKE SENSE TO YOU.**

The Scripture we just read from **Luke 5:5-6**, is the story of the calling of Simon Peter to be a disciple of Jesus. One day Jesus was with Peter after Peter had spent the whole night working hard but catching nothing. The day after this fruitless night of fishing, Jesus had just finished teaching when he turned to Peter and said: *"Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."* The moment Jesus made that statement, the story's outcome hangs in the balance. The question is this: "Will Peter do what Jesus tells him to do?" There appear to be good reasons not to. Peter is a lifelong experienced, and successful fisherman. Jesus is not. Peter had worked hard all night and caught nothing. Will he do what Jesus tells him to do in spite of what he may think or feel? Peter, called Simon here, answered, *"Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word, I will let down the nets."* There are six especially significant words in **Luke 5:5** *"But at your word, I will."* Peter said: *"Lord, I will do what you tell me to do."*

“...Because you say so, I will....” What happened? **Luke 5:6** says: *And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking.* Peter made the catch of his life. If you read the whole story, you see their nets began to break. They called other boats over, and all the boats began to sink under the weight of the catch! At the end of the story, **verse 11** says: *And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.*

The end of the story is *not* that Jesus joined them in their fishing enterprise, so they could buy bigger boats and better nets but that they pulled their boats up on the shore and left everything to follow Jesus. Why? Because the point of the story is that Jesus is the one you can follow with confidence where ever he leads. This is what a life of faith is about. Abraham learned faith when God called him out of the land he knew to go to a land that God would show him. Sarah learned it when God promised her a son in her old age. Moses learned this when God called him to go to Pharaoh and tell him, *“Let my people go!”* Samuel when God told him to anoint the smallest of Jethro’s sons to be king. The disciples of Jesus had to learn it repeatedly as they watched Jesus’ miraculous life, saw him die his sacrificial death then rise again as Lord. The point of this story in Luke is that Jesus is an absolutely reliable guide to every aspect of your life. We can know that when he tells us what to do, even if what he asks us to do does not at first make sense to us, we can do what he says with confidence in Him.

In the Bible, a particular word is used for a life in which you choose, like Peter, follow Christ in faith and obedience. It's called “discipleship.” What is the essence of discipleship?

II. THE ESSENCE OF DISCIPLESHIP IS FOLLOWING CHRIST.

The reason **Luke 5:11** ends with the disciples *following* Jesus is that *following Jesus* is the essence of discipleship. No other statement of Jesus is more often repeated in the Bible than *these two words*; *“Follow me.”* Throughout his ministry, Jesus said, *“follow me.”* He said it to Peter and Andrew and James and John in Mark 1. John 1 tells us that when Jesus found Philip, he said, “follow me.” Later, He said it to Matthew, who was a tax collector. Still, later to the rich young ruler, he said, *“follow me.”* **Luke 9** tells of other unnamed men to whom Jesus said, “follow me.” He said it to all of his disciples.” What Christ said to the first disciples by the Sea of Galilee is what He is saying to you and to me today: *“follow me .”* He said this is the distinguishing

characteristic of his people, *my sheep hear my voice, and they follow me.*

It is easy to get this backward. We've got our plans, ambitions, agendas, and sometimes we expect Christ to come along, following us and blessing it all. Jesus Christ is gracious. He gives good gifts to his people because He is generous. But he said if we hang on to our lives our way, we will lose them. If we hand them over, we will find them. The way to make the most of your life is not to go your own way, hoping Christ will bless you but to turn around and follow him wherever he chooses to lead you.

In a little book titled: *"Following Christ,"* Joseph Stowell writes:

The follower's journey is simple in the sense that the complexity of life is reduced to the single question, "Where is Christ on this issue?" Or, put another way, "Am I on the road with him." While all the world loses itself in speculation and experimentation, about the meaning of life, the follower has a certain singular focus: Christ... Amid the tension of a dozen voices telling us what to do and how to live, His is the one voice that captures the attention of our hearts. ²

To people who are weary of working to achieve goals that only leave them empty, to people who are tired of ending up addicted and enslaved to the things that they thought were going to set them free. To people looking for a credible and compassionate voice that speaks with authority to give meaning and purpose in all the challenges of life Jesus says, *"follow me."*

When a church is active, and new people are coming, it's easy in all the activity to lose sight of your purpose. I once read a pastor describing how he went off alone for a week to seek God and was surprised when God brought him to the painful realization that the church he thought was growing so well was really just getting bloated. He said God showed him that whereas they had formerly had 200 people who were not really living and growing as disciples of Jesus Christ, they now had 400 people who were not really living and growing as disciples of Jesus Christ. To quote **Hebrews 6:9**, *Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.* And, yet, we want to press in and press on.

The essence of discipleship is following Christ. How do we identify

where we are weak, or strong and where we need to take the next step? The Bible helps us with this. In the Scriptures, there are seven significant facets of discipleship that help us to assess our growth and keep on course as we follow Christ. We are going to introduce these seven facets this morning. Study them through the end of the year. And give you support and tools to help you grow in them in the year ahead.

The essence of discipleship is following Christ.

III. THE FACETS OF DISCIPLESHIP ARE SEVEN-FOLD.

1st. A disciple of Jesus is focused on God. Jesus taught us in the Lord's Prayer that when we go to pray, our first prayer should be "*Father in heaven, Hallowed be your name*" That opening prayer is not a formality. It is an orientation for life. Ton the day of his triumphal entry in Jerusalem, as the crowds surge around him, there is a dramatic moment, **John 12:28**, in which Jesus says, "*Father glorify your name!*" **1 Corinthians 10:31** *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* To follow Jesus is to be God-centered.
A disciple of Jesus, like Jesus, is, focused on God.

2nd. A disciple of Jesus is fulfilled in Christ. **John 6:35** "*Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.* A disciple of Jesus Christ is committed to finding spiritual fulfillment in a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. A disciple of Jesus isn't chasing fulfillment in this world. He or she is centering the search for fulfillment on a relationship with Jesus Christ.

These first two facets call us to an upward look. They direct you to God and to Christ. Facets 3 and 4 call you to an inward look.

3rd. A disciple of Jesus is biblically integrated. In **John 8:31-32** Jesus said, *So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* A disciple of Jesus wants to integrate the wisdom revealed in the Bible into every aspect of life. The risen Christ actively speaks to his followers not only by His Spirit but preeminently in his Word, the Bible. Those who follow him are learning how to apply the wisdom of his Word to every facet of daily life, our work life, our home life, our relationships, our ambitions, and emotions are all brought under the light of his word. A disciple of Jesus wants to know the Scriptures in depth and apply them in all of life.

4th. A disciple of Jesus is growth-oriented. In the parable of the sower and the soils in **Mark 4:8**, Jesus says, *And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.*” A disciple of Jesus Christ is committed to ongoing spiritual growth. In **Luke 6:40**, Jesus said, when you are fully trained as a disciple, *you become like your master.* A disciple of Jesus is committed to becoming more and more like Christ through the work of his indwelling Holy Spirit. Therefore a disciple of Jesus is devoted to change. This is a life-long process. You make an effort to address the issues in your life earnestly and prayerfully and to keep growing.

*There is an upward look: focused on God and fulfilled in Christ.
There is an inward look, Biblically integrated and growth-oriented.
Then there is an outward look.*

5th. A disciple of Jesus is ministry-minded. In **Mark 10:45** Jesus said, *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” When he washed the feet of the disciples in the upper room at The Last Supper (Luke 22:7) he said *I am among you as one who serves* and I am leaving you an example. A disciple of Jesus Christ is committed to serving together with others in the cause of Christ. Discipleship involves service.

6th. A disciple of Jesus is committed to the church. In **Matthew 16:18** He said, *I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it!* This is what he is building in this present age. He calls us to join him in the work and build his house! Later in **Matthew 16**, he gave instructions for preserving the purity and peace of the church. A disciple of Jesus recognizes that you cannot be committed to Christ without being also committed to his church. The church is his body through which he works and the bride whom he loves for whom he died.

A disciple of Jesus is committed to the church and...

7th. A disciple of Jesus is devoted to disciple-making. In **John 20:21** Jesus said, *Jesus, said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so, I am sending you.”* A disciple of Jesus Christ is committed to multiplying disciples of Jesus Christ locally and globally. The only way to truly be a disciple of Jesus is to also be committed to making disciples of Jesus. **Matthew 28:18-20** *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, ‘baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and*

of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

So there is an *upward look*: Focused on God and fulfilled in Christ. Then there is an *inward look* Biblically integrated and growth-oriented. Then the last three call us to an *outward look*: ministry-minded, committed to the church, and devoted to disciple-making.

Conclusion

In the weeks to come, we are going to look at each of these in more detail. It might seem a bit overwhelming at first, but we don't have to do it all at once. The goal is to actually give a clearer and broader understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. An old proverb says *the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step*. What is your next step? Will you be a disciple of Jesus?

I remember once, in college, asking a slightly older man at my church what he did for a living? He said, *"I'm a disciple of Jesus Christ, but I moonlight as an airline pilot to support my family."* I heard another pastor say asked a woman at his church what she did and she said, *"I'm a disciple of Jesus brilliantly disguised as a machine operator."*

In **John 21**, there is a moving story of Peter and Jesus. In spite of his confident boasting at the last supper, he was made to face his own shameful weakness when he denied Jesus three times with curses. But at the same time, just as he had seen his shame he had also clearly seen the love and the majesty of Jesus. He had witnessed Jesus dying for his sin. He saw Jesus enduring the cross to pay for our sins with his sacrifice. He had also seen Jesus as risen from the dead. He had personally felt the power of Jesus' forgiveness and compassion by the fireside at the lakeshore that morning. There Jesus asked Peter, *"Do you love me?"* It took some coaxing. Peter didn't feel worthy. But he said, *"Yes Lord you know that I love you."* And Jesus called Peter to follow him. Peter looked over at John and said, *"What about him?"* Jesus said, *what is that to you? You must follow me!* "Follow me" was the last recorded thing Jesus said to Peter.

Christ offers you two great invitations. The first is "come to me." That's where. You come to Him, the one who died and rose again for your

salvation. You come just as you with a willingness to admit your need of Him and put your trust in Him as your Savior. When you do, you receive the gift of new and eternal life. The second great invitation from Jesus is this: “follow me”. It's in following Christ that the new life is expressed and enjoyed, and experienced. At the heart of all true discipleship is a person, not a program. Jesus said I am with you always to the end of the age. Come follow me Jesus says, because I am the light in the darkness. Follow me because my way is wisdom. Follow me because I am the good shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep.

Amen

A Prayer for Receiving Christ

Almighty God, You have beautifully revealed your love in Jesus, whose body was broken and whose blood was shed for our salvation. I admit my need for your saving grace. I turn to Christ, the bread of life, and trust in him for my redemption. I believe he died on the cross to pay for my sins and rose again as Lord and Savior. I receive and rest on him alone for my salvation. Grant me the eternal life promised to all who come to him in faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.

A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal

Create in me a clean heart, O, Lord. I relinquish my demanding insistence on following my own inclinations and priorities in order to fully embrace Jesus as Lord. Help me to be a bold and believing disciple who truly follows Jesus. Empower and sustain me by your Holy Spirit. Guide me by your inspired word. Transform me more and more into his likeness. In Jesus' name, Amen.

¹ Keller, *King's Cross* pp. x-xii See also his books, *The Reason for God*, and *Making Sense of God*.

² Stowell, *Following Christ* p. 22